

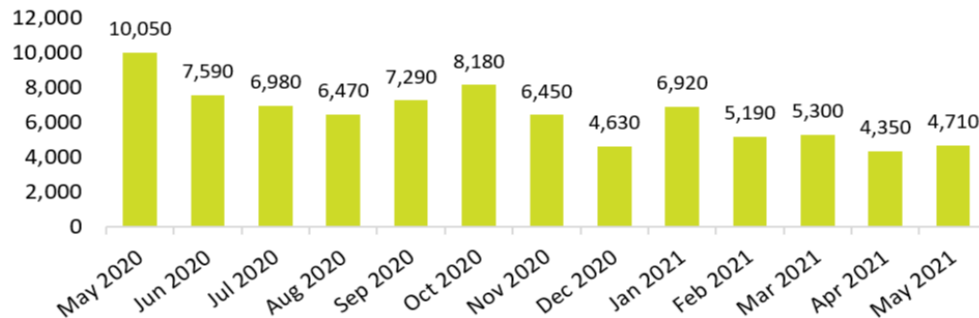
Data to May 2021

Quarterly

Experimental Statistics - Published: 25th August 2021

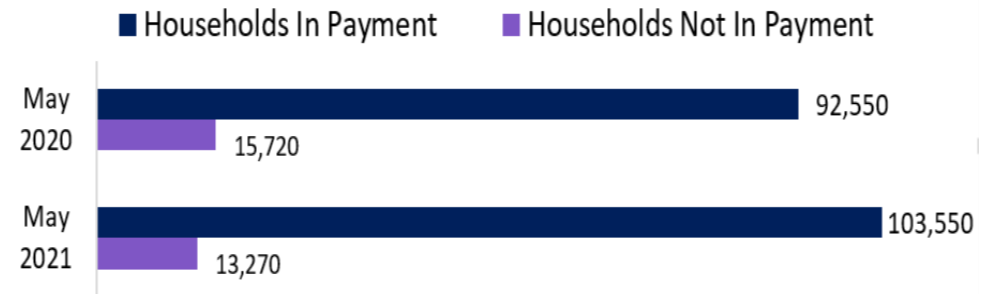
This summary contains experimental statistics on Universal Credit (UC) in Northern Ireland. Statistics have been produced at individual claimant and household level. Universal Credit is a payment to help support households that are out of work or on a low income. Eligibility for Universal Credit depends on a household's circumstances.

## New Claims on Universal Credit



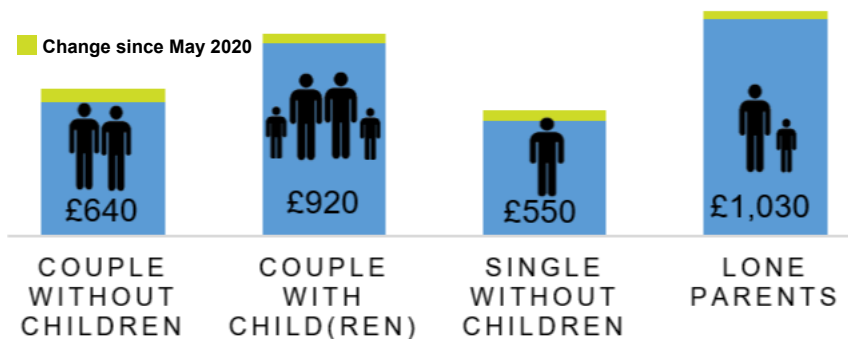
84,080 households made a claim to Universal Credit between May 2020 and May 2021 inclusive. Monthly claims increased substantially following the government measures introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic, but are now similar to pre-Covid levels.

## Households on Universal Credit



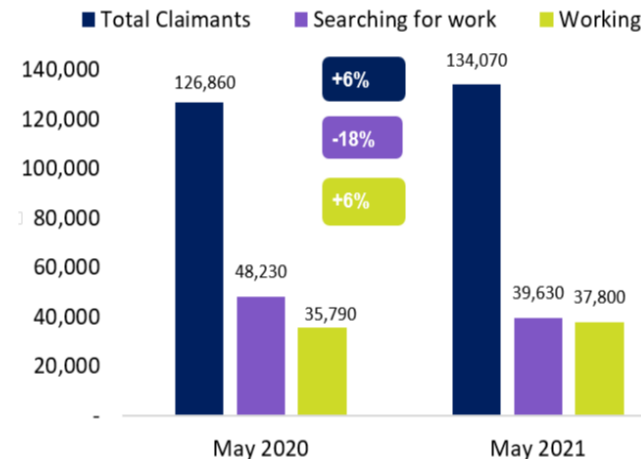
Between May 2020 and May 2021 the number of households on Universal Credit increased by 8% (from 108,270 to 116,810). The proportion of households receiving a payment increased from 85% to 89% over the same period.

## Average Universal Credit Payment at May 2021



On average, the amount of Universal Credit paid to households increased by £60 between May 2020 and May 2021. The increase varies between household type with the biggest increase being seen by couples without children

## Conditionality on Universal Credit



The number of claimants in the searching for work conditionality group decreased by 18% between May 2020 and May 2021.

The number of claimants in the working with requirements and working with no requirements groups increased by 6% between May 2020 and May 2021.

# Publication Overview

## At a glance

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## What you need to know

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| 3    | <p>This summary contains statistics on Universal Credit (UC) in Northern Ireland from its commencement on 27th September 2017 until the end of May 2021.</p> <p>Universal Credit began rolling out on a phased geographical basis in Northern Ireland on 27th September 2017. Roll out for new claims in Northern Ireland completed on 5th December 2018.</p> <p>Universal Credit provides a single award per household based upon the circumstances of the household. Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs are integrated into Universal Credit via additional elements. It also provides additions for disabled people and carers. Universal Credit is available to people who are in work and on a low income, as well as to those who are out of work.</p> |
| 4    | <p>Universal Credit replaces six existing benefits and tax credits; Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.</p>   |
| 5    | <p>Universal Credit payment arrangements differ between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In Great Britain, Universal Credit is paid once per month directly to the claimant, including any housing allowances. Northern Ireland flexibilities are processes put in place to help the transition to Universal Credit in Northern Ireland. They include more frequent payments (twice per month) and the facility for payment of rent direct to the landlord. Payment can also be split between members of a household.</p>  |
| 6    |   |
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## Impact of Coronavirus

The restrictions that were introduced throughout the economy and society as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a large increase in the number of claims for Universal Credit.

This increase in claims for Universal Credit is not all necessarily due to unemployment. On 20th March 2020, the government announced a temporary increase of £1,040 to the Universal Credit standard allowance, increasing the amount of earnings a household could receive before their Universal Credit award is reduced to nil. Moreover, the self-employed who are temporarily without income due to the government's 'stay at home' restrictions, and people and households with COVID-19 or following the government requirements to isolate and not eligible for Statutory Sick Pay may also claim Universal Credit. Those furloughed and on a low income may also qualify.

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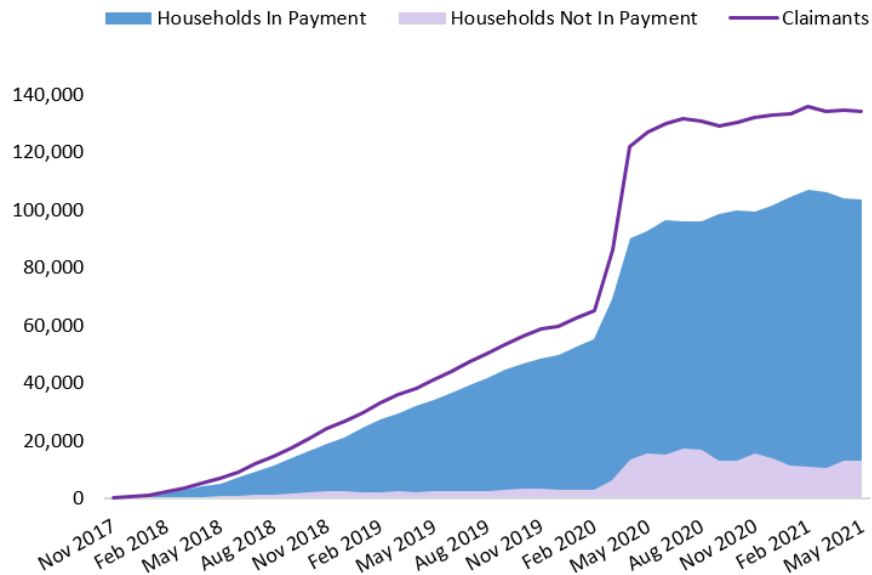
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Further information;  
[Further Universal Credit information](#)  
[Universal Credit introduction](#)  
[Universal Credit customer information](#)

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# Households on Universal Credit

## Universal Credit Households and Claimants to May 2021



The number of households on Universal Credit had been rising steadily since it was rolled out in Northern Ireland. However, the number of households on Universal Credit almost doubled between February and July 2020 when the government introduced restrictions due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

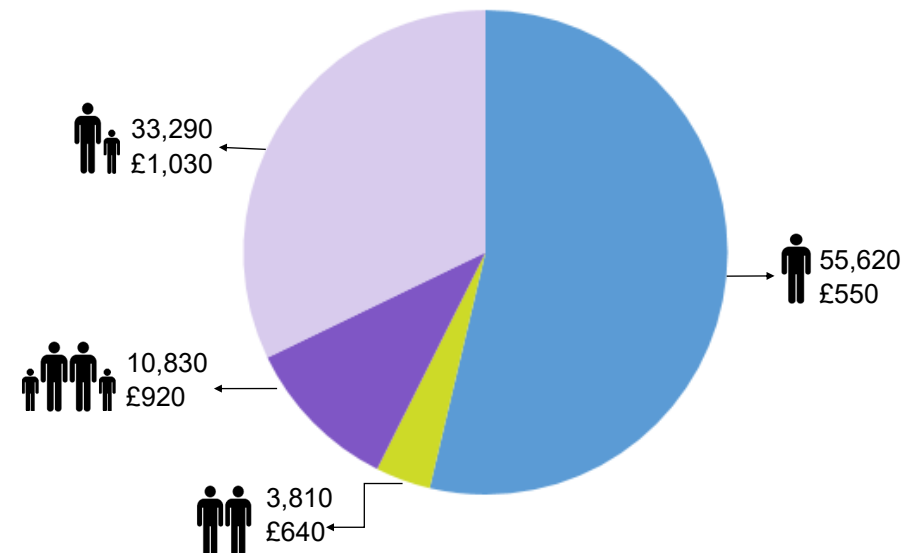
- As government restrictions have started to ease, the increase in households on Universal Credit has slowed with 116,810 households on Universal Credit in May 2021.
- The number of claimants on Universal Credit has been steady over the last quarter, with a small decline from 135,750 claimants in February 2021 to 134,070 claimants in May 2021

The increase in the number of people on Universal Credit since March 2020 should be considered in the context of:

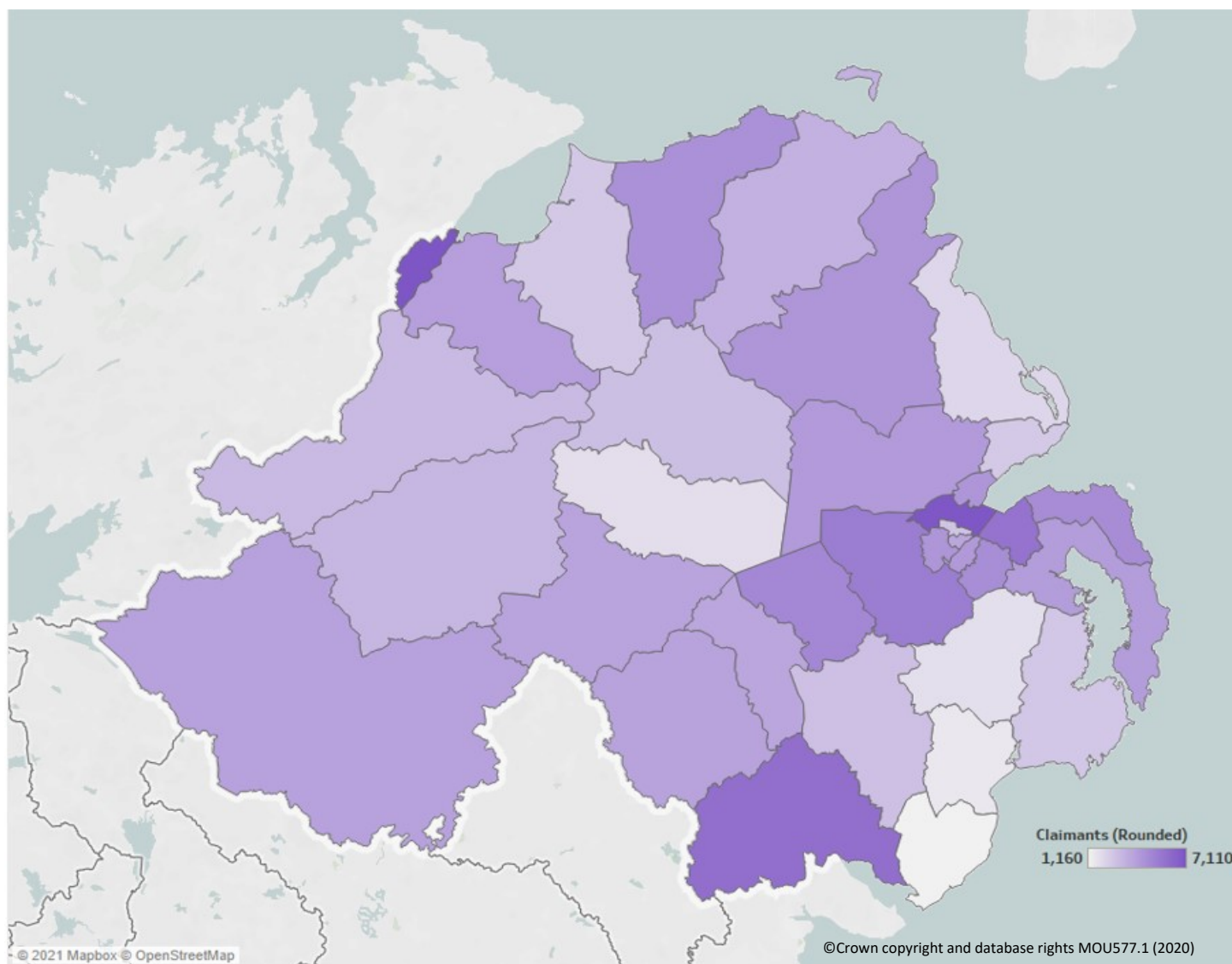
- changes in income or employment status resulting from the coronavirus pandemic;
- changes announced to support people through the coronavirus pandemic, including a temporary £1,040 a year increase to the standard allowance and an increase to local housing allowance rates;
- a temporary policy change whereby nil payment awards were kept open for up to six assessment periods of nil payment, rather than being closed if claimant earnings reduce their award to nil.

## Households in Payment and Average Award Amount at May 2021

- In May 2021, 54% (55,620) of Universal Credit payments were to single people without children, with lone parents accounting for 32% (33,290) of Universal Credit payments. 10% (10,830) of payments were to couples with children and 4% (3,810) to couples without children.
- During May 2021, the average amount (mean) of Universal Credit awarded to households in payment was £740 per month. This is an increase of £20 from £720 in February 2021.
- The increase in average Universal Credit payments between February and May 2021 was greatest for single people with no children, who had an average increase of £20 per month.
- Households with children had higher average payments as a result of entitlement to support for one or more children, and a higher proportion with entitlement to support for housing. Lone parents received on average £1,030, whilst couples with children received an average of £920 in May 2021.
- The higher average payment of Universal Credit since March 2020 is due to annual uprating of Universal Credit entitlements, along with a temporary £1,040 a year increase (£20 a week) to the standard allowance in response to the coronavirus pandemic.



## Where Universal Credit Claimants Live - May 2021



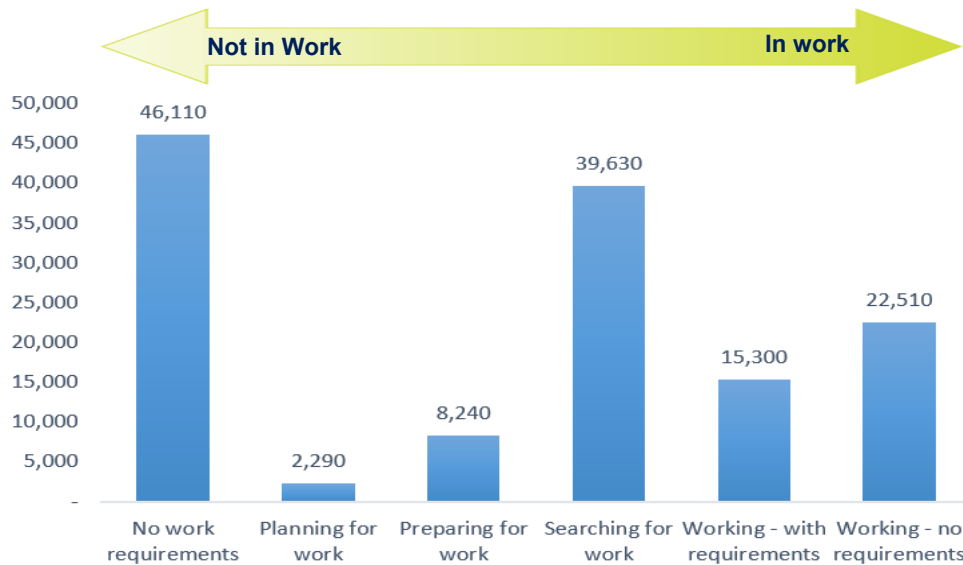
| JBO            | Total Claimants |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Andersonstown  | 4,430           |
| Antrim         | 4,220           |
| Armagh         | 3,930           |
| Ballymena      | 4,430           |
| Ballymoney     | 3,360           |
| Ballynahinch   | 1,780           |
| Banbridge      | 2,840           |
| Bangor         | 4,770           |
| Carrickfergus  | 2,500           |
| Coleraine      | 4,600           |
| Cookstown      | 1,800           |
| Downpatrick    | 2,620           |
| Dungannon      | 3,880           |
| Enniskillen    | 3,960           |
| Falls Road     | 3,810           |
| Foyle          | 7,110           |
| Holywood Road  | 5,860           |
| Kilkeel        | 1,160           |
| Knockbreda     | 4,740           |
| Larne          | 2,070           |
| Limavady       | 2,550           |
| Lisburn        | 5,450           |
| Lisnagelvin    | 4,080           |
| Lurgan         | 5,000           |
| Magherafelt    | 2,910           |
| Newcastle      | 1,500           |
| Newry          | 6,020           |
| Newtownabbey   | 4,430           |
| Newtownards    | 4,140           |
| North Belfast  | 7,100           |
| Omagh          | 3,200           |
| Portadown      | 3,810           |
| Shaftesbury Sq | 4,270           |
| Shankill       | 2,690           |
| Strabane       | 3,080           |

The darker areas of the map are areas with higher numbers of Universal Credit claimants, while the lighter areas are the areas with fewer Universal Credit claimants.

Additional geographical breakdowns are available within the supplementary tables that accompany this publication.

# Conditionality on Universal Credit

## Claimants Numbers by Conditionality Regime to May 2021

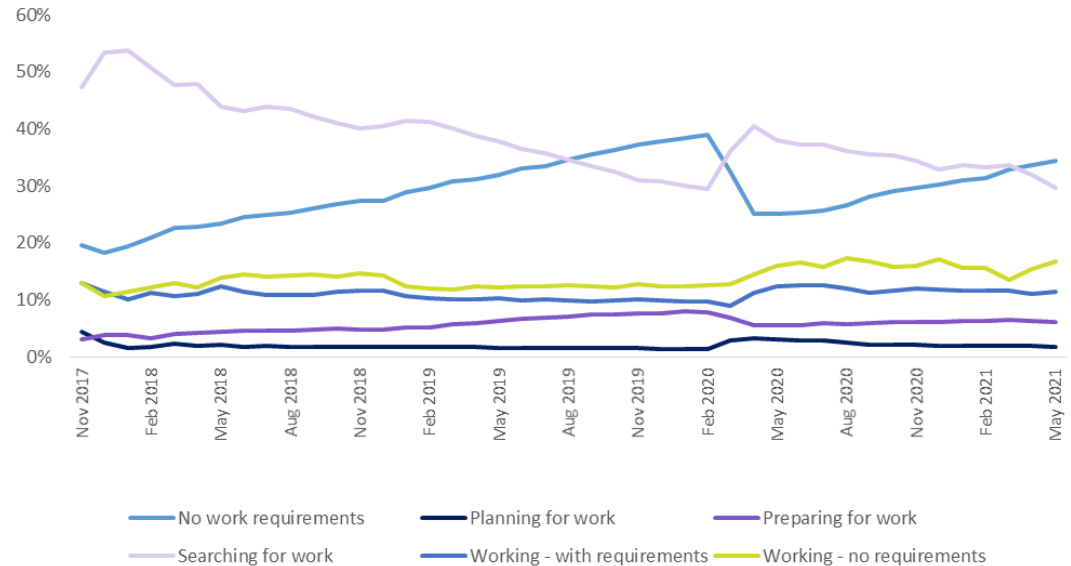


All claimants on Universal Credit are assigned to a conditionality group which determines what type of work-related activity they must carry out to retain eligibility for Universal Credit.

- In May 2021, 39,630 claimants were in the 'Searching for work' conditionality regime, a 12% decrease from February 2021 (45,260).
- 37,800 Universal Credit claimants were 'in work' in May 2021, a 3% increase from February 2021 (36,770).
- The number of claimants in the 'no work requirements' regime rose to 46,110 in May 2021, an 8% increase from February 2021 (42,610).

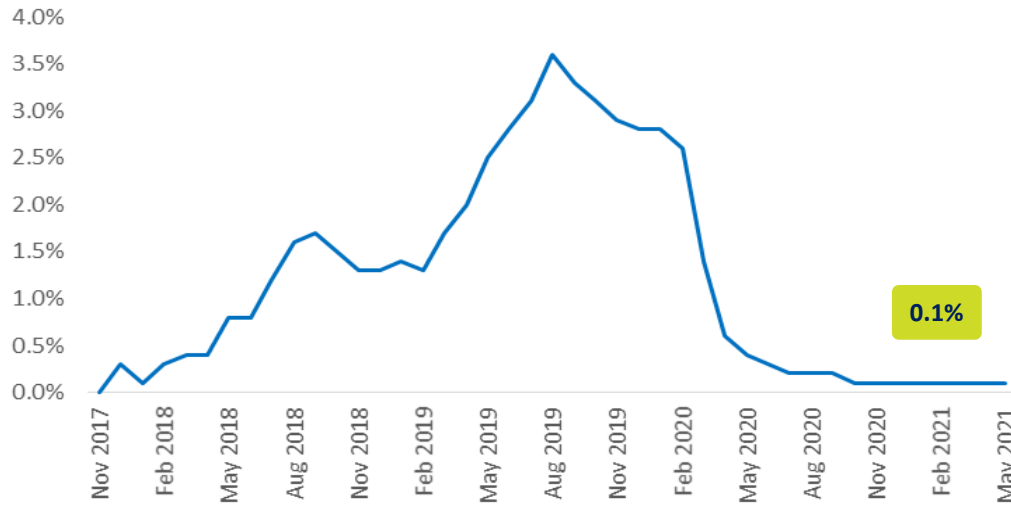
## Claimant Proportions by Conditionality Regime to May 2021

- The rise in claimants on Universal Credit as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic was not all due to a rise in unemployment. While the numbers searching for work increased, the numbers of claimants who were in work (working with or without requirements) also rose.
- Although the number of claimants 'searching for work' increased notably after February 2020, the proportion of claimants 'searching for work' returned to the early 2020 level of 30% by May 2021.
- There was a pandemic-associated peak of claimant numbers in the 'searching for work' group in April 2020, which was also associated with a peak in the proportion of all claimants in this regime (41%) at that time.
- At May 2021, 28% of claimants were in work (with or without requirements),
- A pandemic-associated peak in the proportion of all claimants classed as 'in work' occurred in August 2020, when 29% (38,020) of all Universal Credit claimants were 'in work'.



# Sanctions and Advances under Universal Credit

## Proportion of claimants with a reduction in benefit amount due to a sanction to May 2021



When making a claim to Universal Credit, claimants agree to meet certain work requirements, depending on their circumstances.

If work requirements are not met without good reason, claimants can be subject to a sanction, resulting in a reduction to the standard allowance portion of their Universal Credit award.

Legislative changes in response to the Coronavirus pandemic meant that work-search and work availability requirements were dis-applied between 30th March 2020 and 30th June 2020.

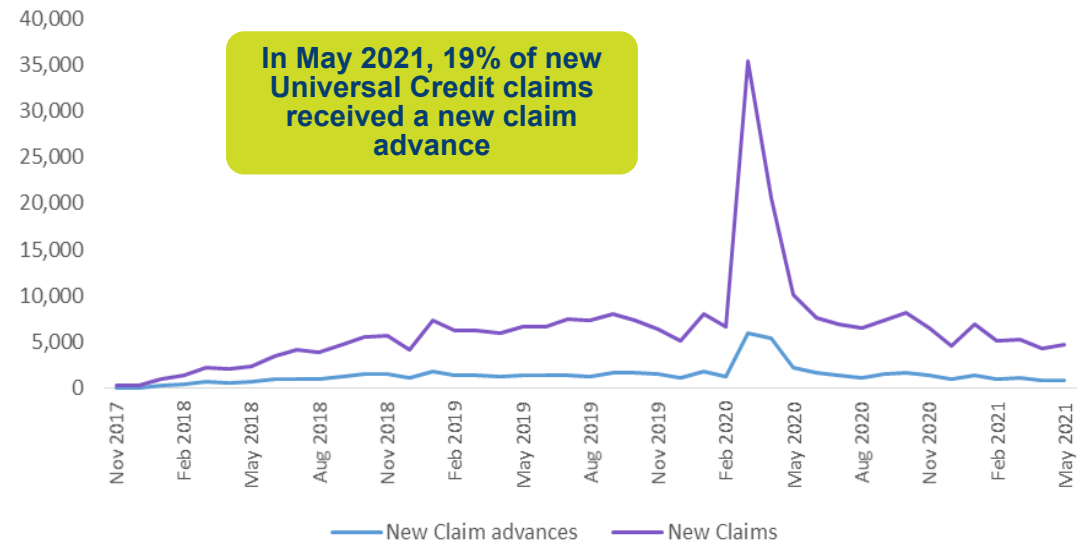
- In May 2021, 0.1% of Universal Credit claimants subject to conditionality when the sanction was applied had a deduction taken from their Universal Credit award due to a sanction.

## Number of New Claims Advances to May 2021

If a household on Universal Credit is in financial difficulty they can apply for a range of financial supports including an advance payment. This is an early payment of their Universal Credit, which will be paid back through a reduction in future payments. *(More information on the different reasons a household might receive an advance can be found on page 9.)*

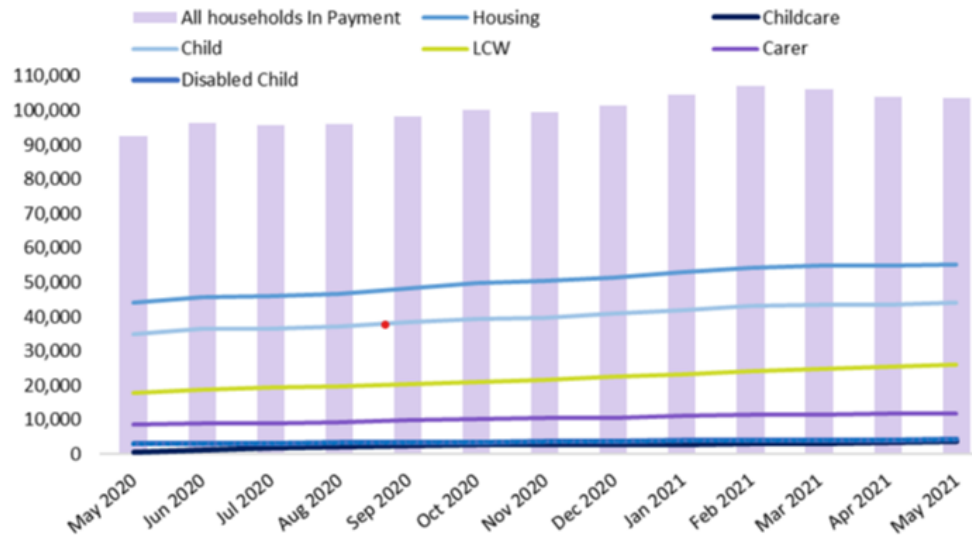
The most common reason for a household to receive an advance is that they do not have enough money to live on until their first payment, which is usually made five weeks after the initial claim. These are known as 'New claim advances'.

- In May 2021, 870 households received a new claim advance, this is around 19% of all claims made that month.
- March 2020 saw the highest number of new claim advances paid, with 5,970 households receiving one.



# Additional Element Entitlements for Households in Payment

## Households receiving additional elements to May 2021

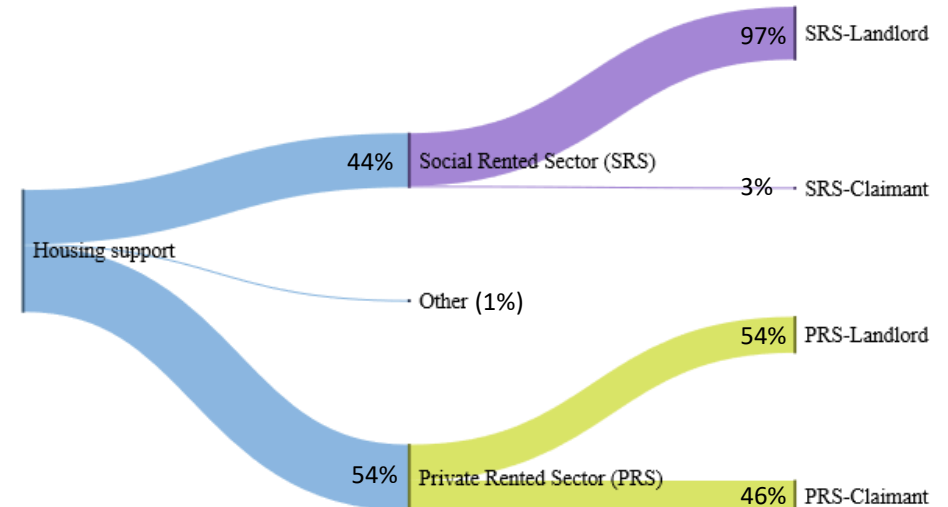


Under Universal Credit, households can qualify for additional elements on top of their standard allowance, depending on their circumstances. *(More details on page 9)*

- The number of households claiming additional elements had been increasing gradually prior to the coronavirus pandemic as Universal Credit gradually replaced existing legacy benefits for new claims.
- In the first few months of the pandemic (March and April 2020), the number of households claiming additional elements increased notably as the number of claimants rose. This was particularly the case for housing and child elements.
- Between February 2021 and May 2021 the proportion of households claiming housing element increased from 51% to 53%; the proportion claiming the child element increased from 40% to 43%; and the proportion claiming LCW increased from 23% to 25%.

## Housing Element of Universal Credit at May 2021

- Support for rental housing costs (housing entitlement) was included in 53% of households receiving a payment in May 2021. This is an increase of 3% since February 2021.
- In Northern Ireland, support for housing costs is made by direct payment to landlord, by default, where renting. This policy position differs from Great Britain where direct payments are made to the claimant by default.
- In May 2021, 44% (24,530) of households receiving a payment of Universal Credit with entitlement to support for housing were in the social rented sector, compared to 54% (30,050) in the private rented sector. The remaining households were categorised as 'other or unknown' for tenure. This includes households in owner-occupied accommodation receiving support for mortgage interest.
- In May 2021, 97% of households entitled to support for housing costs in the social rented sector had these paid directly to a landlord, compared to 54% in the private rented sector.



## About these statistics

These Experimental Statistics have been compiled using data from records of Universal Credit benefit claims held by the Department for Communities. The methodology used and definitions of the statistics may be updated within subsequent releases, along with information on the impact of any changes to the time series already released. These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority, and are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They have, therefore been designated as Experimental Statistics. Users are invited to comment on the development and relevance of these statistics ([Northern Ireland Universal Credit statistics feedback survey](#)).

Figures contained within this publication are subject to rounding to the nearest ten unless otherwise stated. Percentages shown are calculated using figures prior to rounding. Statistics will be published quarterly. Supplementary tables accompanying this publication are available on the [Department for Communities \(DfC\) website](#).

### Report terminology

This report contains four measures:

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Claims     | Claims made counts the number of household claims submitted for Universal Credit  |
| Starts     | Starts on Universal Credit follow an initial interview where eligibility for Universal Credit is confirmed and members of a household accept their Claimant Commitment. Entitlement to Universal Credit must also have been calculated  |
| Claimants  | Claimants on Universal Credit include all individual members of a household who have started and are still on Universal Credit at the end of the reported month. Some claimants will have their claim terminated either at the request of the individual or if their entitlement to Universal Credit ends |
| Households | Households are counted as being on Universal Credit where a claimant or claimants within the household have been included within the count of claimants   |

### Advance Types

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| New claim               | Received if the household is in financial need and does not have enough money to live on until their first Universal Credit payment                                       |
| Change of circumstances | Received if the household is already claiming Universal Credit, and the payment is increasing due to a change in circumstances, but the increase hasn't yet been received |
| Budgeting               | Received if the household is already receiving Universal Credit to help pay for emergency household costs or for help getting a job or staying in work                    |

### Sanction Types

If a claimant fails to meet the requirements of their Claimant Commitment without a good reason, they may be subject to a sanction, resulting in a reduction to their Universal Credit standard allowance for a set time. The amount deducted is calculated as a percentage of the standard allowance and is dependent on the claimant's current circumstances and conditionality regime. Additional elements are not subject to sanction reductions.

Sanction reasons fall into four levels, and sanction length depends on the sanction level and the number of previous failures within the year.

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Lowest | Failure to attend to take part in a Work-Focused Interview. The sanction lasts until the claimant attends or takes part in one, or moves to either the 'Working—no requirements' or 'No Work Requirements' conditionality regimes.  |
| Low    | Sanction lasts until the claimant does what they previously failed to do and were sanctioned for or because the requirement is no longer appropriate or an alternative compliance condition has been met; plus 7, 14 or 28 days for the first, second or third low-level sanction in any 12-month period. |
| Medium | Sanction lasts 28 days for the first sanction in any 12-month period and 91 days for a second medium-level sanction.  |
| High   | Sanction lasts for 91 days for the first sanction in any 12-month period and 182 days for a second high-level sanction. The sanction length will be less than this if the claimant was under 18 at the point of the sanctionable failure.   |



## About these statistics

### Conditionality Regimes

Conditionality regime specifies the category a claimant is in at the end of any given month. Conditionality refers to those work-related activities an eligible adult will have to carry out in order to retain eligibility for Universal Credit. Each eligible adult will fall into one of six conditionality regimes based on their capacity and circumstances. Different members of a household may be subject to the same or different requirements. As circumstances change claimants can also transition between different levels of conditionality. Conditionality Regimes are detailed in the following table:

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| No work requirements        | Not expected to work at present. Health or caring responsibility prevents claimant from working or preparing for work.   |
| Planning for work           | Expected to work in the future. Lone parent/lead carer of child aged 1. Claimant required to attend periodic interviews to plan for their return to work.  |
| Preparing for work          | Expected to start preparing for future even with limited capability for work at the present time or parent of a child aged 2. The claimant is expected to take reasonable steps to prepare for working including Work Focused Interview. |
| Searching for work          | Not working, or with very low earnings. Claimant is required to take action to secure work - or more/better paid work. The Work Coach supports them to plan their work search and preparation activity.                                  |
| Working - with requirements | In work but could earn more, or not working but has a partner with low earnings.   |
| Working - no requirements   | Individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies. Required to inform Department for Communities of changes of circumstances, particularly if at risk of decreasing earnings or losing job.                |

### Additional Elements on Universal Credit

In addition to the standard allowance, there are additional elements in Universal Credit that a household may qualify for based on their circumstances:

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Child                       | A claimant will qualify for the child element if they are responsible for any children who they normally live with.  |
| Childcare costs             | A household will qualify for this element if they are currently paying for registered childcare whilst working.  |
| Limited capability for work | A claimant will be eligible if they satisfy the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). There are two amounts depending on the outcome of the WCA and whether the claimant was in receipt of a work-related activity component of Employment and Support Allowance immediately before claiming Universal Credit. |
| Disabled child              | A claimant will qualify for every child or young person that is in receipt of DLA or PIP or is registered blind.   |
| Carer                       | A household will qualify for this element if they are caring for a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours a week.  |
| Housing                     | A claimant will qualify if they are tenant responsible for paying the rent which the housing costs element will assist with.   |

### Data Quality Statement

The statistics contained within the publication and supplementary tables are subject to retrospective revision in any future releases. This is to account for retrospective actions on the Universal Credit Full Service system (UCFS). The methodology, structure and format of the measures for gathering these statistics are still in development and are also in the process of being quality assured. As such this may also lead to a revision of the figures contained within. These revisions are performed in accordance with T3.9 of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics. Revised figures within these tables may cover from October 2017 to February 2021.